

Consolidating co-management mechanisms in Bay Islands National Marine Park *Promoting fisher-led co-management as a new paradigm for marine management*

BACKGROUND

Artisanal fishing in Honduras is defined as “the activity that fishermen perform individually or organized in cooperatives or associations within three nautical miles of the coast, using boats with a capacity below three tons and employing basic fishing gear with the purpose of providing an economic benefit to the fishers” (Honduras General Fishing Law, 1959). Over the last fifteen years, Honduran artisanal fisheries have shifted from subsistence fisheries to small scale commercial fisheries with a gradual modernization of fishing gear and harvest techniques.

Bigger boats and larger engines allow fishers to extend their range beyond traditional boundaries often bringing them into competition with neighboring communities. The increased costs associated with greater fishing power have driven fishers to adopt unselective fishing gears to increase catch volume. Moreover, Honduran fisheries are open access, allowing anyone with a valid fishing license to harvest fish in territorial waters. Open access encourages unsustainable and often destructive fishing practices as the race to catch fish actively discourages stewardship and compliance with harvest limits, protected areas, and other important regulations.



As a consequence, Honduras is experiencing rapid and unprecedented changes in fisheries. Commercially valuable fisheries such as conch, lobster and grouper have declined dramatically. Government has responded with fisheries closures and regulation that have accomplished little by way of effective conservation and recovery. Social, spatial and technological competition has increased across multiple scales.

In 2010, the Archipelago of Bay Islands was designated the Bay Islands National Marine Park (BINMP), with a total area of 647,152.49 hectares (see location in Figure 1). Marine ecosystems in the Bay Islands are of great importance, providing goods and services to local fishing communities. A total of 500 fishermen depend on these fisheries. The BINMP offers an opportunity to respond to these changes and promote sustainable fisheries. Generally, protected areas in Honduras are managed through a co-management model where local NGOs are responsible to secure the funding to manage National Marine Protected Areas. However, the Honduras government lacks the funding or personnel to effectively manage these areas. Combined with few fishing regulations and strong incentives for noncompliance with those regulations that do exist, the result is very weak governance that benefits neither the fishers nor the resource.

Consolidating co-management mechanisms in Bay Islands National Marine Park to ensure fishermen’s associations’ ability to co-manage fisheries resources

For the past three years, The Nature Conservancy has been working closely with government agencies responsible for fisheries and protected areas, fishers and local co-managers to develop fishermen’s associations’ ability to co-manage fisheries resources. This project proposes an innovative co-management model for the Bay Islands National Marine Park. The aim is to empower fishers in the decision-making process that designs, designates, co-manages, monitors and protects protected areas and no-take zones. To achieve this, The Nature Conservancy has promoted the creation and strengthening of six fishermen associations that will participate directly in co-managing fishing areas inside this protected area.

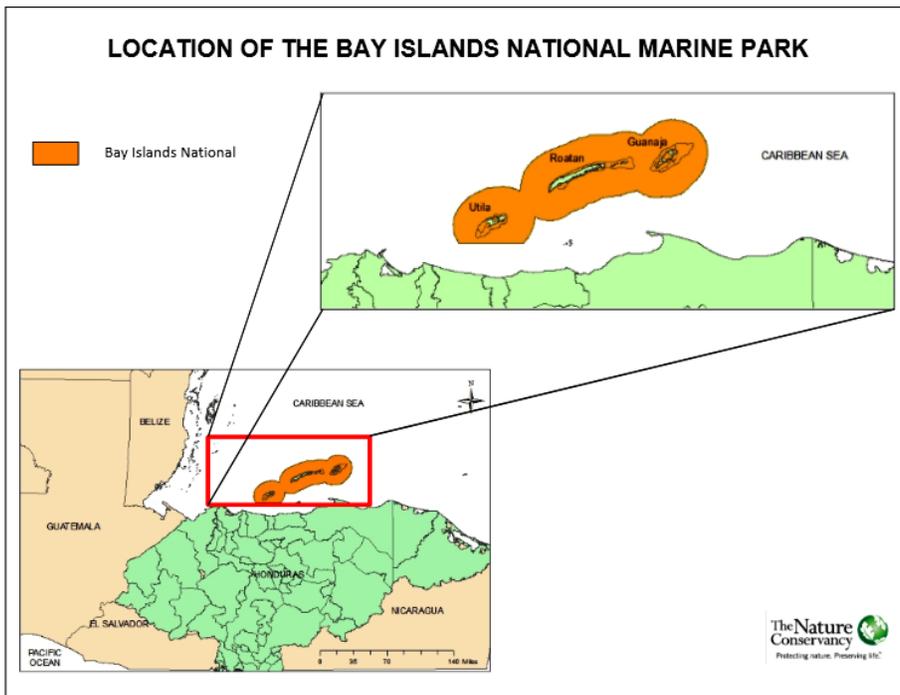


Figure 1: Location of the Bay Islands National Marine Park

In collaboration with government agencies responsible for fisheries and protected areas, TNC will train fishermen associations’ members in fisheries biology, sustainable fisheries and best practices, co-management, connectivity, managed access and fishing regulations. In order to strength fishermen organization skills and build positive relationships, TNC will train fishermen in team work, leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and decision making. Further, in coordination with USAID Central America Regional Program, TNC is promoting the development of local fishers’ capabilities to effectively change fishing behavior and strengthen the

ability of local fishers to undertake management responsibilities. Finally, TNC and local protected area managers in BINMP will promote the involvement of the six associations in the co-management of the BINMP and in the design of new no-take zones.

This is the first time in Honduras that fishermen will participate together with the government in the co-management of the resources they use. Although strengthening fishing groups is not novel, actually providing them with the ability to manage their fishery is innovative.

We anticipate that BINMP’s governance will improve as fishermen become actively involved in their roles and responsibilities in co-management in coordination with government agencies.

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